

Meeting in Person, Studying Online: Designing and Implementing a Hybrid Exchange Program

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Abstract

This article describes an educational partnership between The American Women's College (TAWC) of Bay Path University in the United States and Jissen Women's University (JWU) in Japan. The program featured here comprises three parts. First, a group of six students from JWU traveled to the United States to visit the Bay Path campus and to meet a group of five TAWC students. This was followed by a shared online course in which both groups of students participated. Finally, the TAWC students traveled to Japan to learn about the culture and to reunite with their JWU classmates. This partnership was made possible through the generous support of TeamUp and the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission.

Introduction

Though no longer operating, TeamUp was an initiative that facilitated collaboration between universities in the United States and Japan. TeamUp was part of the larger organization known as the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON), and it created numerous opportunities for universities in the United States and Japan to form partnerships. From the TeamUp website (2019):

TeamUp is a campaign to increase the number of American and Japanese undergraduate and graduate students studying in each other's country by expanding relevant, active, mutually beneficial and innovative agreements among American and Japanese institutions of higher education.

This article will describe such an international partnership, one between The American Women's College (TAWC) of Bay Path University led by Maura Devlin and Jissen Women's University led by Jacob Schnickel. This partnership was funded by a generous grant from another U.S. organization, the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission (JUSFC), an agency within the United States' State Department, whose mission is to promote comity and cooperation between Japan and the United States.

COIL Training at Kansai University

In one of its final initiatives, TeamUp invited pairs of one university from Japan and one from the U.S. to present a proposal for a “dual hybrid exchange program,” a designation for a project that would involve each team traveling to its partner’s country as well as participating in an online learning component. Thus, each proposal would comprise three main elements: University A would visit University B; B would visit A; and there would be an online course, for which A and B would collaborate. Selected teams would be invited to Osaka to participate in a training on COIL (collaborative online international learning) methodology given by Professor Keiko Ikeda, an expert on and proponent of COIL methodology and Vice-Director of the Center for International Education and Professor in the Division of International Affairs at Kansai University.

In July 2018, their proposal having been selected, Jacob Schnickel and Maura Devlin traveled to Osaka for training on the COIL methodology with Professor Ikeda. The main elements of the COIL framework are that students from various countries and institutions use online tools for synchronous meetings as well as asynchronous communication with each other and that they collaborate to complete a joint course project in small groups with a shared assessment.

At the training, two teams, each comprising one Japanese and one U.S. university, learned how to design and administer a course based on COIL methodology. Professor Ikeda and her associates provided a workshop grounded in their experiences as COIL practitioners. The training was rich in illustrative vignettes and practical advice. Participants learned about useful online tools, assessment practices as well as some of the challenges inherent in conducting online courses between students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

While undergoing the intensive COIL training, Schnickel and Devlin began to realize that their COIL project would manifest a bit differently than the ones being described because Devlin’s institution, TAWC, is a fully online program for adult women undergraduates studying asynchronously in six-week long courses. Prior COIL projects tended to be executed between two face-to-face learning environments with terms of a more conventional length. Since the Jissen course would be an in-class learning experience on Saturdays over a fifteen-week semester, Schnickel and Devlin began to understand the unique aspects that their COIL course would embody.

During this training, Schnickel and Devlin sketched the basic structure of their shared course on women's leadership from a cross-cultural perspective. They agreed that Jissen students would join a regular TAWC course, an accelerated six-week term delivered on their online platform. They also decided to have students interview women leaders in their respective countries using a standard set of questions. Then, teams comprising students from both universities would analyze the results of their interviews, looking for similarities and differences. Students would then present their findings in a slide presentation. The student experience would also be enriched and supported by the weekly readings and online discussions typical of all TAWC courses. With this basic outline in place, Schnickel and Devlin parted ways and agreed to meet regularly online to sort out the details.

Planning: Online Course, Visit to United States & Visit to Japan

Upon returning from COIL training in Osaka, Schnickel and Devlin set up bi-weekly meetings every Friday - at 8 o'clock in the morning for Devlin and 9 o'clock at night for Schnickel. Through these conversations, they were able to flesh out in more detail their curricular goals: introducing students to intercultural communication, examining women's leadership in the U.S. and Japan, exploring culture's influence on women's leadership and vice versa, interviewing a woman leader and using field notes to compare qualitative data. Students would need to use online tools to collaborate across time and space in a low stakes way and to brainstorm ways these goals could manifest. From these goals, elements of the course, curricular goals and outcomes, and specific aspects of the course content and learning activities began to take shape. For example, Schnickel and Devlin started by developing course outcomes (or competencies), indicating what the students would be able to do at course completion, as stated below:

- 1) apply interpersonal communications theory to describe Japanese and American cultures and to communicate effectively across cultural borders
- 2) capitalize on technology tools to communicate across cultures, time, and space
- 3) articulate conceptual and practical ways to lead organizations in Japan and in the U.S.
- 4) describe values related to moral and ethical leadership, trust, and cultural awareness in Japan and the U.S.
- 5) describe how Japanese and American leadership styles have influenced organizations
- 6) describe their own leadership styles in their cultural contexts

In keeping with COIL methodology, a collaborative assignment that would be completed in small groups and whose learning would be assessed and graded collectively was developed first. Working from the plan they had sketched in Osaka, Schnickel and Devlin determined that they would have students use their field notes from their individual interviews with women leaders with the other members of their small group so they collectively could compare and contrast women's leadership in Japan and in the U.S. The final assignment was determined to be done as a Google Slides presentation so that the students in each group would be able to contribute across time and space; though thirteen hours apart in time, the students would be able to see and respond to one other's contributions using Google's comment feature.

TAWC has a well established process for developing online courses through its learning management system (LMS), Canvas, which includes an instructional designer who helps bring the course's learning experiences to life and guides faculty on how learning activities can be structured in the online space. TAWC's course development process features a set schedule, in which templates (Google Docs) for each of the six weekly modules are due to the instructional designer for review and building in Canvas. This timeline for developing the course was slated to be January 14 - March 8, 2019. Schnickel and Devlin therefore had a roadmap for how the course would be built.

The course description had already been written for the JUSFC grant submission. Schnickel and Devlin collaborated, along with colleagues, on the grant application, prior to meeting in person in Osaka in July 2018. As women's institutions, they had a shared goal in wanting to include a women's perspective in their COIL course, and given their respective national lenses, they decided to create a comparative learning experience for students to explore women's leadership in the two cultural contexts, in the U.S. and Japan. In addition, in a world that is increasingly connected via technology, Schnickel and Devlin wanted students to engage with technology tools that enable collaboration across time and space. The course description, aimed to meet these curricular goals, is provided below:

Leadership requires a balanced understanding of human behavior and applied managerial skills, as well as the cultural contexts of organizations. This course is designed to explore similarities and differences in women's leadership styles across cultures, through a collaborative exploration with a group of students from The American Women's College at Bay Path University (TAWC). This course will enable students to become active investigators

of organizational life from a comparative perspective by using Interpersonal Communication theory to communicate effectively across cultural borders. Students will incorporate and apply conceptual and practical tools to effectively guide organizations through change. They will also examine values related to moral and ethical leadership in Japan and the U.S., including issues of social justice, diversity and service to others. Through an experiential learning lab, students will assess leadership styles in these cultural contexts and think critically and creatively about the necessity of vision, trust, and cultural awareness to gain strategic competitive advantages for action in a global world. Students will explore how Japanese and American leadership styles have influenced organizations. Students will also assess their own leadership styles. This course has been developed by The American Women's College and Jissen Women's University, and the curriculum will draw from established courses in TAWC's Leadership and Organizational Studies program. English will be the medium of communication between Jissen and TAWC students, but learning Japanese culture, including some aspects of Japanese language, will be part of the course outcomes.

It is important to note here that developing the online course necessarily required more focus on TAWC's standards and timeline. Some of the biggest challenges came as Schnickel and Devlin sought to integrate Jissen students—with their fifteen-week term—into the TAWC schedule. The structure of TAWC courses is standardized in many ways. During the six-week term, for instance, students are required to participate in online discussions in a well defined manner: one major post in response to a prompt set by the instructor to be completed by Thursday of a given week, and one response to a fellow student's post, which would be due by the following Saturday. Thus, the first challenge in developing the course was to address the alignment of the curricular calendars, not simply the varying length of the courses at the respective institutions, but the alignment of the academic years, since universities in the U.S. typically kick-off their academic years in September and Japanese institutions start the academic year in April.

Schnickel and Devlin were able to bridge this “apples-cherry blossoms” divide when they realized that TAWC's six-week session that runs annually from late April through early June (April 25 - June 8 when the course ran in 2019) could be superimposed over the fifteen-week semester at JWU, with important benefits. Namely, the relatively early start of the JWU semester would grant Schnickel and his students time in class together to review the syllabus, the LMS, to which they would have an orientation when in the U.S. visiting TAWC, and the course content. They would have the ability to review the first few assignments together, to

practice posting their online discussions in English, and allay any fears of technology, online learning or interactions with the American students.

With the scheduling issues addressed, Devlin and Schnickel decided on a theme for each of the six weeks of the shared course and then set about gathering articles and videos that would align with these themes. The weekly themes were 1) Intercultural Communication, 2) Women's Leadership in Cultural Contexts: United States, 3) Women's Leadership in Cultural Contexts: Japan, 4) Japanese and American Women Rise, 5) Ethics, Social Justice, Collaborations & Technology, 6) Analyzing and Presenting as Social Science Researchers. Having six themed modules is the standard format for TAWC courses.

While the readings and online discussions were necessary for the TAWC requirements, the interview component was conceived with both groups of students in mind. The idea was straightforward: using the same set of interview questions, Jissen students would interview women leaders in Japan, and TAWC students would interview women leaders in the United States. Both JWU and TAWC students were taught ways of probing to elicit additional information from interviewees. Teams comprising students from both schools would then analyze their results, noting similarities and differences among the different interviewees. They would then present these findings in a slide presentation to submit as a team assignments and share with the other teams.

The interview questions:

1. Please tell me what being an effective woman leader means to you.
2. Can you describe your leadership style for me?
3. How did your childhood experiences as a girl in your culture influence you as a leader?
4. What barriers have you faced in your career (or life, or work, etc.) as a leader?
5. Please describe how and when you identified as a leader.
6. What advice would you share to future women leaders or younger women thinking about their futures?

The shared online course presented a need for collaboration tools that exceeded typical courses at both institutions. TAWC and Jissen students alike have access to the suite of Google tools through their institutional email accounts. However, familiarity with these tools varied. Students at both schools, for instance, were more accustomed to using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint to submit their assignments. Devlin and Schnickel both thought the Google

tools would present a learning opportunity for their students. These hunches were borne out by the actual class experience. Learning to use Google Slides, Google Docs and Google Hangouts to launch group video calls were all new experiences for both TAWC and JWU students. The students not only figured out how to gain access and use these tools, but they truly were able to collaborate on the shared final assignment via Google Docs and Google Slides.

Using a backward design approach, Schnickel and Devlin then developed learning activities that scaffolded to this summative collaborative project. In order to learn to use Google Docs, there was an assignment in which students pasted their individual interview field notes into a Google Docs file. They were then taught how to “tag”, or communicate with, their group mates using features of Google Docs. In this fashion, they were tasked with identifying a time and technology for a live video call using Google Hangouts. Content pages in the course were developed so students would have instructions on how to use the technology to make video calls.

As mentioned, Schnickel and Devlin developed additional assignments and provided readings and materials to support students’ abilities to complete course activities. Discussion prompts in the discussion boards were developed to give students a chance to discuss with each other their thinking, their progress, their trepidations, and their successes. These prompts also allowed students to discuss how they would approach their informational interview with a woman leader, in addition to providing content on how to conduct a social science interview, how to take field notes, how to reach out to a woman leader and request her valuable time, and how to draw themes from the interview field notes.

In order to introduce themselves, test out technology tools for collaborating, and to debrief on the learning experience at the end of the course, students were asked to post videos of themselves—an initial self-introduction video and a video of their reflections on their learning in the class. Content, videos, and readings in the course drew from intercultural communications theory and culture theory, Japanese and U.S. culture and language, as well as articles from American and Japanese news sources about women leaders, issues women face in both countries, and gender and social trends. For both the students from JWU and from TAWC, these learning activities represented opportunities and skills they had not yet experienced. Even while studying in an online environment, TAWC students do not often use video as a way of submitting reflections or assignments. Devlin and Schnickel chose to

include this component in their shared course hoping that the added dimensions of vocal quality and facial expression afforded by video would lend a deeper sense of connection than would text alone.

Upon completing the development of the course content, learning activities, and assessments, the TAWC instructional designer built the course in the LMS. Students were then enrolled by the Registrar at TAWC, and so the JWU students were ready to begin. Because of the way the calendars aligned, Schnickel and his students had a couple of face-to-face class sessions to talk about how the JWU students would participate in the discussion boards, to clarify expectations, and to prepare for the video self-introduction before the online class officially opened.

Jissen to the United States

Even as course planning was underway, members of the Bay Path staff, headed by Veatrice Carabine, were developing plans for the Jissen visit to the United States. Through discussion, it was decided to balance intellectually rigorous activities along with ones that would be more relaxed and entertaining. Thus, some general categories emerged: sightseeing, campus tours, lectures, workshops at companies, dining, and performances. The exchange team agreed to use this basic framework in planning both the Jissen visit to the United States and the TAWC visit to Japan.

These plans were implemented beginning on March 22, when six Jissen students, Mari Ishizuka, a member of the International Affairs Division, and Schnickel flew from Tokyo to Albany, NY to begin their one-week stay in the United States. Devlin and her husband met the Jissen group at the Albany airport, and together in a Bay Path bus, they made their way to Springfield, Massachusetts.

March 23 saw the five TAWC students welcoming the six Jissen students with hugs and gift bags. This was followed by lunch at the student cafeteria, during which time, the students talked and got to know one another. After this emotional first meeting, it was on to official business. The Jissen students had photographs taken for their Bay Path ID cards. These cards were significant in that they were the same cards all Bay Path students receive and served to formalize the partnership. The cards also include each student's ID number, which allows students to be registered in TAWC courses. This was followed by watching a play on the Bay Path campus.

On March 24, the entire group of TAWC and Jissen students took a bus to New York City, where they spent the day. This visit included stops at Times Square, Rockefeller Center Plaza, Battery Park, Wall Street, One World Observatory and a trip on the Staten Island Ferry.

March 25 was a day of workshops. Students first visited the LEGO facility in Enfield, Connecticut. Here, they toured the facility and participated in a workshop that focused on LEGO initiatives such as moving toward manufacturing toys with sustainable plant-based materials and providing diversity and inclusion training for employees. This was followed by a visit to Yankee Candle, where students toured their flagship store and learned about the history of the company from one of its employees, who shared her thoughts on leadership and gender.

Jissen students spent most of March 26 on the Bay Path campus. The day began with a presentation given by Masamichi Hongoh, president of the Japanese Society of Greater Hartford. This was followed by a workshop on leveraging international experience when applying for jobs. Students were then welcomed by the president of Bay Path University, Dr. Carol Leary, who shared stories and took time to talk with each person in the Jissen group.

In the middle of the week, on March 27, students spent a full day in Boston, which included stops at Boston Common, Faneuil Hall, and the New England Aquarium.

On March 28, the group began to look ahead to the shared online course by participating in a workshop on Canvas, the LMS that serves as a platform for all of TAWC's online courses. This would ensure that they would be prepared to engage in the online course. This was followed by a visit to Springfield's Quadrangle, a collection of museums including an art museum, a science museum and a Dr. Seuss museum. The day ended at Northampton, Massachusetts, where students explored unique shops and galleries.

On the last day of the visit, the entire group of Jissen and TAWC students attended the annual Women's Leadership Conference, where they joined more than 2,000 other attendees for an inspiring series of workshops and plenary sessions delivered by Mel Robbins and Rita Moreno.

Phase 3: Online Course

In the online course they developed, Devlin and Schnickel employed the COIL training they had received in the previous year, but now that the course was about to run, the COIL methodology would be tested with actual students.

Careful planning and day-to-day management was essential to ensure that the two groups would be able to work effectively together. For Professor Schnickel and the Jissen students, their weekly meetings served as a sort of staging area for the work the students would go on to do in the following week. Because the LMS used in all TAWC courses was new to the Jissen students, these opportunities to look at the discussion prompts, discussion boards and reading assignments as a group proved invaluable.

The first assignment for this shared online course was for each student to make a short video, in which she would introduce herself to her fellow students. Most students were nervous about using the technology for these video (Screencast-o-matic software was suggested, though students also used iPhones and other mobile technology), but once mastered, they overwhelmingly loved connecting with each other in this medium. For the JWU students who were filming themselves speaking in English, a video self-introduction allowed them to practice and revise, giving them agency over what they ultimately presented. A TAWC student, despite her comfort with English as her native language, shared that the video exercise helped her with her social anxiety because it gave her control of how she was presented in a way that face-to-face learning oftentimes does not.

Another unique aspect of this course is that not all TAWC participants were part of the JWU-TAWC exchange, since the JUSFC grant funding covered the expenses for five students and one faculty member from each institution. When the course ran in April-June 2019, there were 20 students in total, five TAWC students on the exchange with JWU, nine TAWC students not involved in the exchange, and six JWU students. Courses at TAWC and JWU do not typically have two instructors so this was a unique teaching and learning experience in this regard as well.

The main project of the course required students to conduct interviews of women they identified as leaders. Students from the two schools would then work in groups to compare the results of their interviews. Each of the three groups comprised two Jissen students and five Bay Path students. They would look for similarities and differences between the two cultures

represented. Because students in both groups were using a standard set of questions, rendered in English or Japanese to suit the interviewee, the teams were able to make comparisons using data gathered from the same questions.

Communication across time zones proved challenging. The thirteen-hour time difference pushed students to adjust their schedules and fit in group meetings whenever they could. Not all students were able to attend every meeting, but the students seemed to take this unavoidable aspect of international partnerships in stride and found ways to ensure that all group members were informed about the status of their project. This took the form of asynchronous messaging via internet tools and direct communication among students in the same country.

Each group completed a final presentation using Google Slides. In these, students presented information on each of the women they interviewed, including profession, educational background and a quotation about leadership from the interview. Students also presented similarities and differences in leadership style, which they found in their readings for the course and in their interviews.

Phase 4: TAWC to Japan

The final component of the program saw the five participating TAWC students and Devlin, the faculty member in charge, come to Japan. In planning for the visit, the involved faculty and staff members at Jissen kept their visit to the United States in mind and tried to provide the TAWC group with a similar range of activities—those with more of an academic or cultural focus balanced with those that would be more entertaining.

The TAWC group stayed at the at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center in the Yoyogi area of Tokyo. A short bus ride from Jissen's Shibuya Campus, this facility was a convenient homebase for the students during their stay. To provide an added sense of security, at least one Jissen student or administrator stayed at the center each night, too.

On their first full day, June 17, the TAWC group, accompanied by several of the Jissen students who had visited Bay Path, took a tour of Tokyo that included visits to Tokyo Tower, the Imperial Palace, and Asakusa, a cruise on the Sumida River, lunch and a tea ceremony.

On the following day, June 18, the TAWC and Jissen students traveled to Kawagoe, Saitama to attend a workshop at the Yaoko Corporation. The workshop was provided by Hiroko Kawano, who described her research on women's leadership. Later in the day, the group attended a kabuki performance with subtitles in English. Two TAWC students were even invited onto the stage to participate in a short interactive segment.

After a morning visit to Meiji Shrine on June 18, the Bay Bath group was welcomed to the Shibuya Campus by Jissen's vice president, Masanori Namba. This was followed by a pair of lectures on the founder of Jissen Women's University, Utako Shimoda delivered by professors Shigeo Yuasa of the department of Japanese literature and Madoka Murakami of the department of English literature. In the afternoon, the Bay Path and Jissen students donned *yukata*, light summer kimono, and had a photoshoot on Jissen's rooftop garden.

On June 19, the two groups of students, accompanied by two members of the Jissen's International Affairs Division, took a day trip to Kamakura, a city near Tokyo that is home to many Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.

June 20 saw two cultural workshops at Jissen's Shibuya Campus. First, the students learned about and tried their hand at *shodō*, Japanese calligraphy. This was followed by a workshop on the *koto*, a traditional Japanese stringed instrument. After these sessions, the Bay Path students went souvenir shopping in the Omotesando area.

Saturday, June 21 was the last full day for the Bay Path group. The two groups went to Disney Sea, where they celebrated their international partnership and enjoyed one another's company.

Conclusion

The most prevalent takeaway about the shared online learning experience that students mentioned in their final self-reflections was that they tremendously enjoyed getting to know students from another culture and learning more about each others' countries. They were in awe that they managed to complete a group assignment across a thirteen-hour time gap and an almost 11,000 mile physical divide. Their confidence grew in the way they learned to use digital tools and to take a risk in reaching out to a woman leader for an interview. They honed their interview skills and gained knowledge about leadership and the labor force. Schnickel and Devlin similarly identified the students' tremendous growth in these areas in the short six-week course. They additionally learned that the nine TAWC students not participating in

the exchange became close in spirit with the JWU students, a realization that can be built into other courses, even if physical exchanges are not part of future learning opportunities.

References

About TeamUp. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://teamup-usjapan.org/about/>